



A black and white photograph of the interior of a Gothic Revival style church. The view is from the back of the sanctuary looking down a long, carpeted aisle towards the altar. The pews are dark wood and arranged in two main sections separated by the central aisle. The walls are light-colored with tall, narrow windows featuring intricate tracery. The ceiling is high with a series of pointed arches supported by wooden beams. At the far end, the altar area is visible, featuring a large, ornate cross on the wall and a pulpit to the right.

Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church
Rev. Ronald L. Slaughter, Pastor

Celebrating 172 Years of Ministry

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1842~~ Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church ~~2012

Celebrates 172nd Anniversary

Sunday, August 19, 2012

Written by Arlene Warner, Historical Research and Photographs by Jimmy Richardson, Photographs by Ron Barkley

"As we enter into His gates with thanksgiving in our hearts, and enter His courts with praise . . ."

Our church family celebrates 172 years in ministry of Saint James AME Church in the City of Newark, New Jersey. This special occasion is a testament to strong faith and our spiritual legacy. The earliest period of preparation necessary in establishing a new church through prayer (and no doubt fasting) took place prior to its incorporation in 1842, therefore, bringing us to a full 172 years of church ministry. Originally, Bethel AME Church was formed under Rev. C. Birch, however, it was briefly disbanded, then re-established as Saint James AME Church, then located on Green Street. Church services were held in various places before settling at 94 Union Street. Recollections of those earliest days of Saint James have been shared by those among us who came from Union Street. They are Theresa Cavaness, Edna Graves, Mabel Limerick, Addie Schenck, Rev. Dr. Mary White Williams, Geraldine Argus and Alberta Reynolds. It is important to record details of their oral histories for the permanent church history. Here we look back over some of the highlights of the church's history, beginning with the most recent.

As the 50th Pastor, Rev. Ronald L. Slaughter was appointed to the pastorate of Saint James on May 29, 2011, by Bishop Franklin Richard Norris. He relocated, in June, from Macon, Georgia, to assume this latest post in his 16-year pastoral career. Pastor Slaughter was later joined by his loving wife, Kyla Trinetta Brown Slaughter and two young daughters Kellyn Skyla, and Kylenn Rona, following the birth of their son, Ronald Levant affectionately called "R2". He serves as the fiftieth pastor to shepherd the largest AME church in the state of New Jersey with some 4,000 congregants. The Saint James family warmly welcomed our new first family, including giving a live video conference Baby Shower from the church fellowship hall here in New Jersey to Mrs. Slaughter and the girls at home in Georgia, while awaiting the arrival of their newest addition. It is also important to note that Ronald Levant Slaughter, II is the first son of a serving pastor of Saint James to be baptized here – another historic event.

In a show of support for education, one of the core values of our church, early-on Pastor Slaughter called a meeting with all the college students of the church. Those in attendance for that informal meeting were encouraged in their academic pursuits, as the Pastor made a pledge of prayerful support and followed up with a monetary blessing during their semesters. This year's graduates at all levels were recognized in June to celebrate their accomplishments. Information on available scholarships is available for those who may be eligible.

Saint James' appreciation and prayerful support was extended to the first responders for their service to the community, Pastor Slaughter invited Newark's own to a Sunday morning service saluting them for the life-saving protection and rescue work they do every day. Members of law enforcement, firefighters, and EMS personnel were invited. Many were present in uniform to receive our blessings, prayers and the Word preached by Pastor Slaughter.

In Rev. Slaughter's first year of leadership, he has established a finance committee and placed an increased focus on paying off existing church debt as well as building up a savings reserve. In addition, much needed repairs have begun at the church including renovation to the vestibule, at a cost of \$12,000; renovations of the church parsonage costing over \$65,000 for the safety and well-being of the first family with young children. Sow-A-Seed Offerings designated for these purposes have been used to pay for these expenses. There is still much work to be done in the continued stewardship of this landmark edifice built in 1845. The rich history of Saint James can only be highlighted very briefly here, as our own Bro. Jimmy Richardson, who is a historian, archivist, and professional photographer in-residence has researched and assembled an extensive collection of documents, memorabilia, and photographs that chronicle much of the history of Saint James throughout the years; far beyond what most of us fellowshiping in recent years are even aware. For instance, a forward written by Rev. E. L. Blake (for whom the Blake House is named) for the laying of the cornerstone expresses sentiments that can be found to be relevant 60 years later as we commemorate Saint James commitment to serving this community and its stewardship of this historic church. Through the years, Saint James has been the church home of so many from all walks of life. Everyone from just plain folks, to a host of educators, doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, lawyers, electricians, plumbing and general contractors, business owners, single parents, those without permanent shelter, and elected officials including,

Council Members, Mayors, Freeholders, Governors, and Senators have also come at various times to fellowship at and become a part of the church called Saint James.

Richard Allen, founder of the AME Church was a former slave. The first church he established in 1888 was the historic Bethel AME Church, known as "Big Bethel", in Philadelphia. Although an uneducated man, he emphasized the value of education. AME Churches have founded colleges and universities across the United States including Wilberforce University in Ohio, Morris Brown in Georgia, and many others.

Church highlights before 1945: A photograph of the Roland Hayes Glee Club formed in 1939, served as an early choir on Union Street, a copy of the program page for its first year anniversary concert is in the collected papers. Rev. Joseph H. Slade, D.D., was the pastor at that time. The accompanist was Theresa Slade (now Cavaness), daughter of the pastor.

Highlights from 1945 to 2012: The congregation has occupied the present building located at 588 High Street (now Martin Luther King Boulevard) since January 1945, having moved from its previous location at 94 Union Street. Prior to the acquisition of the church on Union Street, the congregation worshipped at various locations. The present church had been the Old High Street Presbyterian Church. In August of that same year, the first marriage in Saint James at the new location on High Street, was that of the late Mr. John C. Reynolds and Mrs. Alberta Reynolds., and to this union, three daughters and one son were born. James Ballard was a dedicated worker as the church sexton and custodian for 35 years before retiring in 1980. A roster lists the names of all the prior pastors to lead Saint James. However, only one name on that list had the honor of being elected and consecrated the 105th Bishop of the AME Church. Bishop Vernon Randolph Byrd was elected from the pulpit of Saint James in 1984.

A Mortgage Burning Service was held just one year after acquiring the Old High Street Presbyterian Church building, Saint James was blessed to be able to pay the mortgage in full by December 1945, at the end of its first year. This swift accomplishment, was celebrated on January 13, 1946, and was attended by invited clergy, dignitaries, local politicians such as the then Mayor of Newark, Vincent J. Murphy. The church property had been purchased for the sum of \$35,000, under the pastoral administration of Dr. Mansfield E. Jackson.

Other special services and events have been many as Saint James has hosted the Annual Conference on several occasions, as early as 1939 and as recently as 2011. The Millennium celebrations held in 1999, 2000, and 2001, where joint fellowships of four churches – Saint James along with St. Matthew AME (Orange, NJ), First Baptist of Lincoln Gardens (Somerset, NJ), The Cathedral Second Baptist (Perth Amboy), and Fountain Baptist (Summit, NJ). A 5,000-seat auditorium was filled to capacity as 103 charter buses transported worshippers from the five churches to Ocean Grove, New Jersey, a historic district established in 1869. The church is also proud to send and sponsor the YPD to the AME Youth Congress yearly and the young people look forward to attending.

Upon successfully completing the application process, Saint James was placed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places in 1972. By gaining landmark status and eligibility for monies designated for historic preservation, the church received a substantial grant of \$1.3 million in 2000 awarded by the New Jersey Historic Trust, supported by a \$450,000 low-interest revolving loan these monies were used to restore the sanctuary. During the beautification work, services were held at nearby Arts High School for about nine months or so. The church edifice built in 1849 was designed in the Gothic Revival style by renowned architect John Welch. It is said to be one of his first projects upon coming to the United States. Welch went on to create many others in Newark and New York, yet died poor at a restaurant on Myrtle Avenue in the local area. An addition, built in 1890 by famed architects Carrere & Hastings, while the "rose" window and other stained glass is considered to be work of Louis Comfort Tiffany. Historic preservation is not just about old buildings, nor elaborate architecture, but it is very much about stewardship. The important considerations to be considered in determining the historic significance of a property are the "Who", "What", "Where", "When" and "Why". In accordance with the scripture in Luke 12:48, *"To whom much is given, much is expected"*. As a church family our caretaking and stewardship in maintaining historic status will continue Saint James' eligibility to apply for additional grant monies for other projects around the church. In the study of architectural history and sustainability, it is learned that nineteenth century buildings such as ours, and those built earlier were constructed to last not just for generations but for centuries. Not until the twentieth century did the concept of "disposable buildings" come into the collective mindset. Historic preservation, green initiatives for energy efficiency and sustainability are "best practices" employed in the today's fields of architecture, engineering, and construction in this twenty-first century. As we plan for future growth in numbers and in ministry opportunities for the next 100 years, we can do so with a good record of our stewardship in the place that the Lord entrusted to us, since 1945.

Ministries at Saint James are many, and include Dance Ministry, Music Ministry, Prayer Ministry, Kitchen Ministry, several Usher Boards, the Stewards/Stewardess Boards, Trustee Board, the YPD, also Ministry to Men, a new Singles Ministry and the Social Action Network, Marriage Enrichment Ministry, a Media Ministry, Pastor's Aide, and ministries for Health and Financial Freedom, among others. Saint James' ministry further expanded into the community in 2006 with Worship on the Green at Essex Green Cinemas with a 90 minute power point presentation Worship Service at 9:30 AM. Second Site is currently held at South Orange Performing Arts Center and continues to grow. The roster of the ministerial staff of Saint James names many who assist in the work here. Dr. Edward Verner, a respected physician in Newark, served as associate minister of Saint James for many years until he was called home to be with the Lord. Rev. Raquel A. St. Clair Lettsome, Ph.D., served Saint James faithfully as Executive Minister, and Minister to Women for seventeen years. The body was blessed by her ministry of teaching and preaching, and we were joyful to witness her marriage in August of 2011.

Services to the community include Saint James AME Towers, a 20-story apartment building of 200 units of affordable housing built at a cost of \$6.5 million, and dedicated in 1973. The Saint James AME Social Services Organization, located in the Blake House, provides free meals served daily, a food pantry, assistance with utility bill payments, and other emergency needs. Other programs include intergenerational After Care and the Safe Haven Summer Day Camp. After suffering a fire in 2010, the daily feeding program's kitchen was renovated in 2011 by the Food Network's series: Restaurant Impossible with Chef Robert Irvine. This was an extra special blessing enabled the staff and volunteers to continue serving those who are hungry and receive recognition for their great work. Rev. William D. Watley, Ph.D., served as the church's longest tenured pastor for twenty-six and a half years until being appointed to take the helm of St. Philip AME Church in Atlanta in 2011. Under the visionary leadership of Rev. William D. Watley, several initiatives, programs, and services were birthed at Saint James. Worship On Worship "WOW" is our mid-week worship service, attended by many from other churches in the Greater Newark area and from their downtown workplaces for a spiritual refreshing at lunchtime. Formerly, Saint James Preparatory School (now Visions Academy Charter High School) was dedicated in 1999. It achieved an outstanding record of academic and educational excellence and student success with a 100% rate of college acceptance of graduates. However, due to challenges of the recent economic recession, SJP graduated its final class in 2009. One year later, a privately owned and administered charter school opened providing tuition-free education. Lifting a financial burden, the church-owned school building is again fully occupied and Pastor Ronald Slaughter is a member of the Board of Trustees.

The legacy of Saint James is from the past—to the present—into the future looking towards the next 100 or so years, should the Lord delay His coming. Down through the years, Saint James AME Church has seen pastors as well as congregants "tarry for a season" as God has allowed. Some have been elevated to a higher calling, gone on to their reward. There have been countless marriages, babies born and baptized, and many homecomings. Services for Communion, Holy Week, Thanksgiving, Candlelight Christmas Eve, Martin Luther King Day, and Watch Nights are celebrated within these consecrated walls. Some stained glass windows are in memoriam to members of the Saint James family that have long before us gone on to their reward. From this church called Saint James, much prayer and praise has gone up, worship rendered unto God the Father, and even speaking in tongues, teaching and preaching. Many, many, many souls have come to the saving grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ with life-changing results through this ministry. Through strong faith and fortitude, in the Spirit of the Lord, let us look ahead to what more God has in store for us as we carry out our assignment given to the Under Shepherd in Pastor Slaughter. As we continue "Growing for God's Glory", while laboring here together, let's remember that we have been taught that, "God has a vision for your life that is greater than any vision that you can have for yourself or that anyone else can have for you."..... Further, as we strive to be truly loving people of God, a 100% tithing, and giving church body, as we increase our prayer life and fasting while we more earnestly seek the face and the will of God. As we strive to forgive ourselves and others as we need to be forgiven. We must *"study to show ourselves approved unto God, workers that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* Even in all this, we look back over the diligent work and many sacrifices that were made by those brothers and sisters who tread this path before us, and as we train and teach, inspire and encourage those who the Lord planted here with us. And in the words of Pastor Slaughter, "... the Best in Christ Jesus is Still Yet to Come!"

Special thanks and much appreciation to the Saint James Office Staff for their assistance in this collaborative effort.

**A HISTORICAL EXHIBIT OF SAINT JAMES PHOTOGRAPHS AND DOCUMENTS AS DESCRIBED IS ON DISPLAY
IN THE SHOWCHASE LOCATED ON THE LOWER-LOWER LEVEL OF THE CHURCH.**

(A larger exhibit is planned for public viewing at a date to be announced)

A photograph of the interior of St. James A.M.E. Church, showing a long, narrow aisle with wooden pews on either side, leading towards a large, ornate altar with a cross. The church has a high, vaulted ceiling and arched windows. The image is framed by a dark red border.

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St. James A.M.E. Church
139TH SESSION
NEW JERSEY CONFERENCE